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ABSTRACT

This teacher's guide for public television's 3-part adaptation of Charles Dickens's "Oliver Twist" provides information that will help enrich students' viewing of the series, whether or not they read the novel. The guide includes a wide range of discussion and activity ideas; there is also a series Web site and a list of Web resources. Informational material in the guide includes a section about looking at film; a section called "From Novel to Film"; biographical material on Charles Dickens; and a section about Victorian England. The guide presents viewing strategies for each of the three episodes and gives suggestions for keeping viewing journals. It also organizes the discussion questions and activities (both pre-viewing and post-viewing) by episodes and features a thematic focus for each episode: Love and Marriage in Victorian England (Episode I); Poverty, Identity, and Destiny (Episode II); and Cowardice, Courage, and Redemption (Episode III). (NKA)

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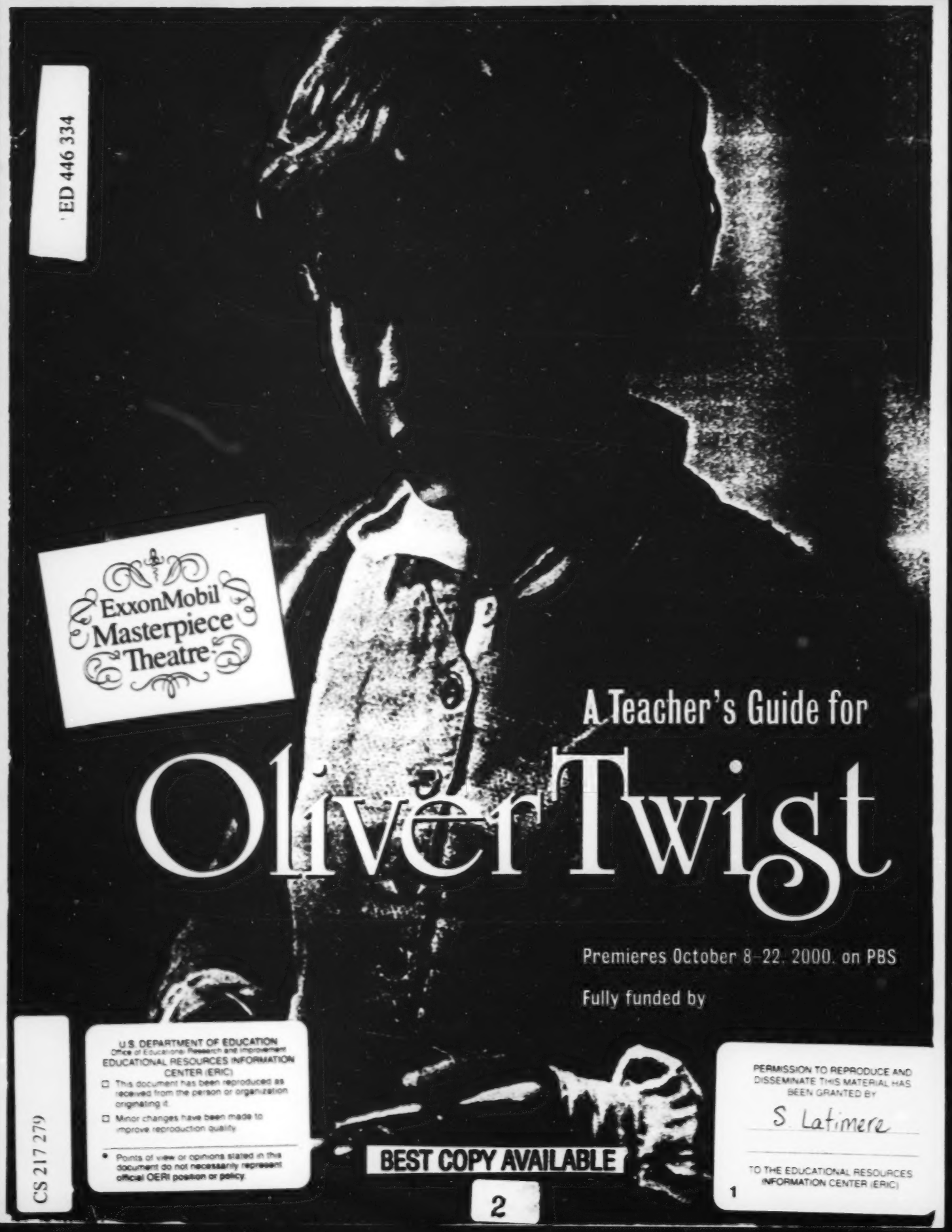

ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre

A Teacher's Guide for Oliver Twist

Premieres October 8-22, 2000, on PBS

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Public Affairs

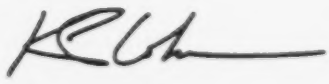
ExxonMobil

Dear Educator,

We are pleased to provide you with this teacher's guide for *Oliver Twist*, an adaptation of Charles Dickens's classic tale, premiering on EXXONMOBIL MASTERPIECE THEATRE, Sundays, October 8–22, on PBS.

Our Web site at www.pbs.org masterpiece provides additional information on this program for you and your students. I hope you'll find these educational materials and EXXONMOBIL MASTERPIECE THEATRE programming helpful in motivating your students to learn more about classic literature, its authors, and characters.

We consider these classroom materials an integral part of our commitment to broaden the appeal of the classics to students, and we commend your role in enhancing student interest. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve our EXXONMOBIL MASTERPIECE THEATRE educational outreach efforts, or would like to share how these materials were beneficial in your classroom, please write to me at EXXONMOBIL MASTERPIECE THEATRE; 5959 Las Colinas Boulevard; Irving, Texas 75039.



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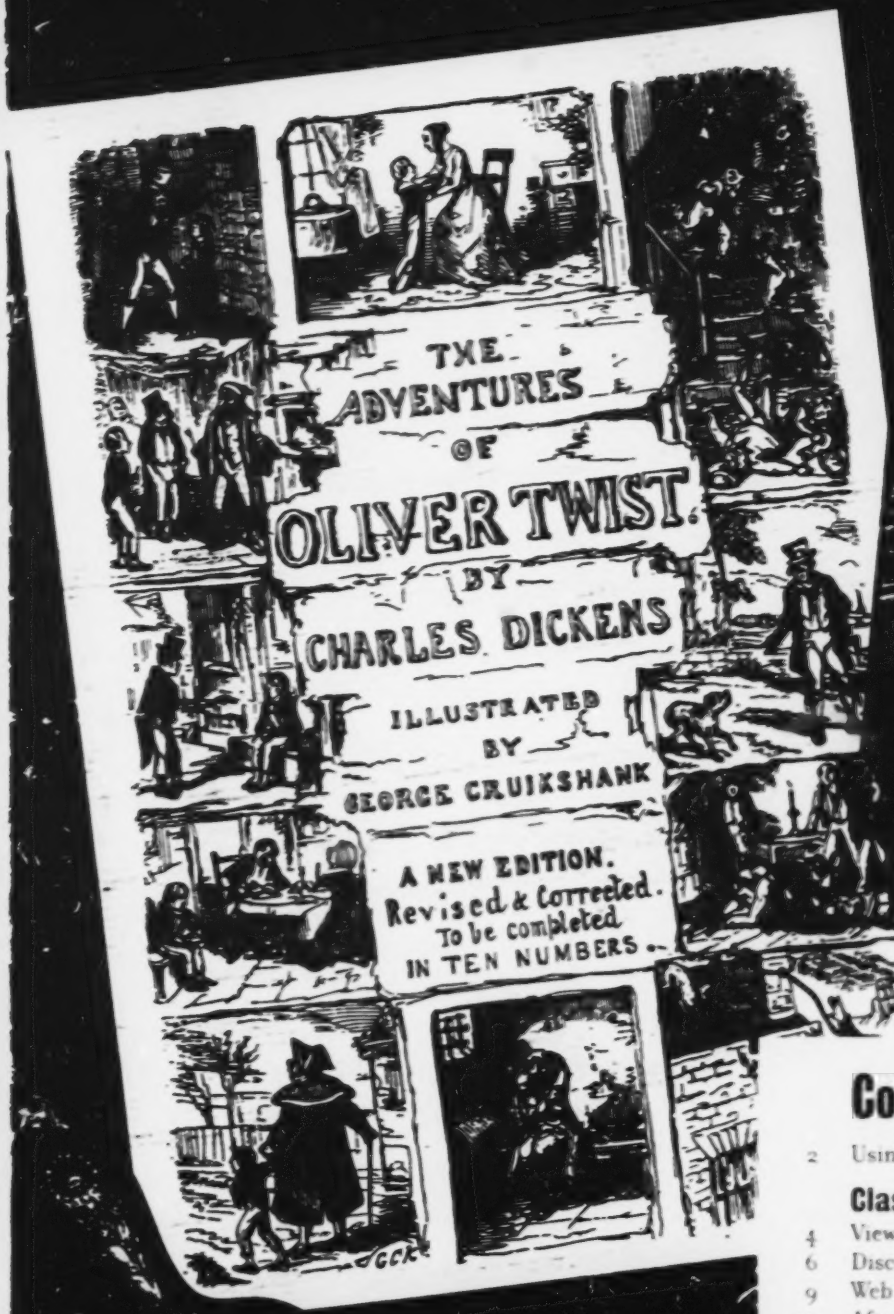

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Using Oliver Twist in the Classroom

Welcome to ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre's adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. This teacher's guide provides information that will help enrich your students' viewing of the series, whether or not they read the novel, including a wide range of discussion and activity ideas. In addition to using the teacher's guide, we hope you will visit and bookmark the series Web site **www.pbs.org/masterpiece/olivertwist**—where you will find extensive resources to support the series.

Broadcast Schedule

The three two-hour episodes of *Oliver Twist* will air on most PBS stations from 9:00 PM to 11:00 PM EST. Check local listings for broadcast and repeat dates and times in your area.

EPISODE I
Sunday,* October 8

EPISODE II
Sunday,* October 15

EPISODE III
Sunday,* October 22

* Note: *Oliver Twist* will air on Mondays in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Orlando, San Diego, Salt Lake City, and Pittsburgh.

Off-Air Taping Rights

Educators may tape *Oliver Twist* and use it in the classroom for one year after broadcast.

Purchasing Videocassettes

To purchase videos of *Oliver Twist* ($39.95, WG1000)—or ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre adaptations of *David Copperfield* or *Great Expectations*, or to request a free catalog—contact WGBH Boston Video at (800) 949-8670. (No public performance rights available.)

$29.95
WG890

$29.95
WG603

Ordering Additional Guides

If you would like to order additional teachers' guides, contact:

Oliver Twist Guide
WGBH Educational Print and Outreach
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134
e-mail: WGBH_Materials_Request@wgbh.org

Help Us Help You!

You may receive a survey form from our independent evaluator, Goodman Research Group, asking what works (and doesn't) about this guide and accompanying Web site. Please take the time to fill out and return this survey. Your views are very important to us. You can also fill out a survey during the month of November on the Web site (and we will enter you in a drawing to receive free *Oliver Twist* videocassettes). In addition, Exxon Mobil Corporation generously supports these guides and is always happy to know what you think. Please feel free to communicate with them as well.

About the Web Site

Find up-to-date program listings for the current season.

Explore this database covering thirty years of ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre.

Look for teachers' guides and a literary timeline covering the whole series.

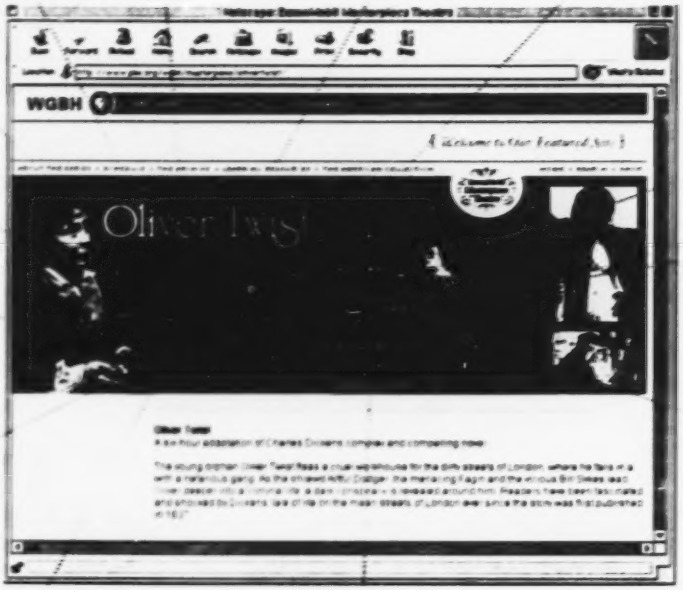
Click here for information about the new collection of programs by American authors.

Find answers to your questions about ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre.

Read this essay on Victorian serialization.

Compare excerpts from the novel to the screenplay and actual footage from the film.

Challenge your students to test their knowledge of Dickens and *Oliver Twist*.



Keep track of the characters through photos paired with Dickens's descriptions and information about the actors.

Follow the plot of the novel on this nineteenth-century map.

Explore what was going on in Dickens's life and world around the time of his most popular works.

Invite your students to publish their thoughts here about the film, the novel, or the author.

Find strategies for using the different Web features, an electronic version of this guide with relevant Web links and resources, and an article by a high school English teacher describing his experience teaching *Great Expectations* as it was published—one episode a week.

Introducing The American Collection

ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre's American Collection debuts October 25 with the premiere of *Cora Unashamed*, based on the short story by Langston Hughes. This new series, the centerpiece of ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre's 30th anniversary celebration, will present seminal works by American literary masters, including Hughes, Willa Cather, Esmeralda Santiago, James Agee, and Eudora Welty. Visit **www.pbs.org/masterpiece/americancollection**.

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Viewing Strategies

Oliver Twist is made up of three two-hour programs. We have suggested how you might break up the programs to be viewed over several days.

Episode I

Airs Sunday,* October 8, 2000, 9–11 PM

Plot Synopsis

Young Agnes Fleming becomes pregnant by the charming but feckless Edwin Leeford, and cannot understand why he won't marry her. The truth is he is stuck in a loveless, forced marriage to the soulless and greedy Elizabeth Leeford, who lives abroad with their epileptic son, Edward. Leeford sees a future with Agnes when he learns he is to inherit a fortune from a rich uncle in Rome. Elizabeth follows Leeford to Italy and reads his new will. It leaves his money to Agnes and her unborn child, who will inherit his father's fortune if he reaches adulthood without committing a crime or disgracing his family. Elizabeth poisons Edwin. Mother and son go in search of Agnes, knowing they must kill her to inherit the money. Edward's attempt to murder Agnes fails, and she, having learned Leeford is dead, flees her disgraced family and travels on foot to a small seaside town. There, in the workhouse, she gives birth and dies, telling no one her name. The child is christened Oliver Twist by the parish beadle and sent to be raised at a baby farm.

Suggested Viewing Segments

Day 1

43 minutes

Start: Episode opening

End: Brownlow looks at Agnes's portrait and sighs, "Edwin!"

Day 2

40 minutes

Start: Edward and Elizabeth Leeford in Paris

End: Agnes standing at the cliff

Day 3

30 minutes

Start: Brownlow playing the piano

End: Conclusion of episode

*Check local listings. *Oliver Twist* will air on Mondays in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Orlando, San Diego, Salt Lake City, and Pittsburg.

Episode II

Airs Sunday,* October 15, 2000, 9–11 PM

Plot Synopsis

Oliver is taken to live in the workhouse, where he is branded as a troublemaker when he dares to ask for more gruel. He is sold as an apprentice to an undertaker and is nearly found by Edward, who has learned Oliver's identity. Oliver runs away, and he is spotted by the Artful Dodger, who takes him to Fagin's den. He meets Nancy and the terrifying Bill Sikes. Edward, now calling himself Monks, has hired Fagin to set Oliver up as a criminal and disgrace him in the eyes of Brownlow, Leeford's best friend and the administrator of his fortune. The plan backfires when Oliver's innocence is proven to Brownlow and the warm-hearted man takes him into his home, unaware that Oliver is his dear friend's lost son. Fagin and Sikes force Nancy to grab Oliver outside Brownlow's home. Fagin tries again to defame Oliver by sending him to burglarize Brownlow's country home. Bill Sikes and Toby Crackitt force a terrified Oliver to climb through a window, and he is shot by the footman.

Suggested Viewing Segments

Day 1

41 minutes

Start: Episode opening

End: Mrs. Mann leaving Sally's deathbed "Stone dead. Nothing to tell after all."

Day 2

40 minutes

Start: Fagin showing Monks the sleeping Oliver

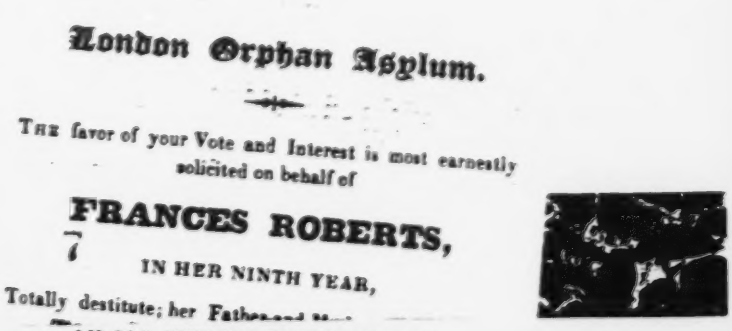
End: Brownlow's argument with Mrs. Bedwin

Day 3

26 minutes

Start: The wedding of Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Mann

End: Conclusion of episode


London Orphan Asylum.
THE favor of your Vote and Interest is most earnestly solicited on behalf of
FRANCES ROBERTS,
IN HER NINTH YEAR,
Totally destitute; her Father

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Nancy and Bill Sikes

Episode III

Airs Sunday,* October 22, 2000, 9–11 PM

Plot Synopsis

Sikes drags Oliver from Brownlow's country house and leaves him for dead in a ditch. Oliver makes it back to the door, where he collapses and is recognized by Mrs. Bedwin, Brownlow's housekeeper, who takes him in. Meanwhile, Monks has managed to obtain the locket Agnes wore when she died in the workhouse, the key to proving Oliver's identity. Fagin and Monks track Oliver to the country house, where they are seen and recognized by Oliver and Rose Fleming, Agnes's sister, who has been raised by Brownlow. Nancy overhears Fagin and Monks plotting against Oliver, and visits Brownlow in London to alert him to Oliver's danger. Brownlow suspects Oliver's true identity when Nancy describes Monks. She protects Fagin and Sikes, but the Dodger tells them about her visit. Sikes murders Nancy. A mob pursues Sikes and Fagin. Sikes falls to his death and Fagin is arrested. Monks is forced to reveal all he knows about his half-brother, and Oliver learns his identity and secures his inheritance.

Suggested Viewing Segments

Day 1

41 minutes
Start: Episode opening
End: Brownlow's piano duet with Dr. Losborne

Day 2

42 minutes
Start: Bill and Nancy argue
End: Fagin's arrest

Day 3

30 minutes
Start: Tea at Brownlow's
End: Conclusion of episode

Fagin and Monks

Viewing Journals

To help your students keep track of the plot during the six-hour film and to focus their viewing, you may want to have them keep a viewing journal. Possible formats include:

1 After each viewing session, have students spend five minutes writing down observations or plot summaries. Before the next viewing, ask volunteers to read their entries.

2 To help keep track of all the characters, divide journal pages into four columns:

Character	*Location*	*Relationship to Oliver*	*Good or bad influence on Oliver*

Characters include Oliver, Edwin Leeford, Agnes Fleming, Elizabeth Leeford, Edward Leeford (Monks), Brownlow, Fagin, Bill Sikes, Nancy.

3 Make a page for each character as they are introduced. During or after each episode, have students note the important events that happen to each character, including conflicts, climaxes, and resolutions that affect them. They could also do this journal in two columns: students can record specific events in the left-hand column and their observations and analysis of each event on the right.

4 After viewing, students can use their journals to create a Chain of Events graphic organizer.

They may need to include one or more parallel plot strands that ultimately come together at the end.

Other Web-based resources that may be helpful to students are the map of Oliver's London and the "Who's Who," found at the series Web site.

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Discussion and Activities by Episode

Episode I

"Wherein it is shewn how Oliver Twist came to be born in such sad circumstances..."

Thematic Focus:
Love and marriage in Victorian England

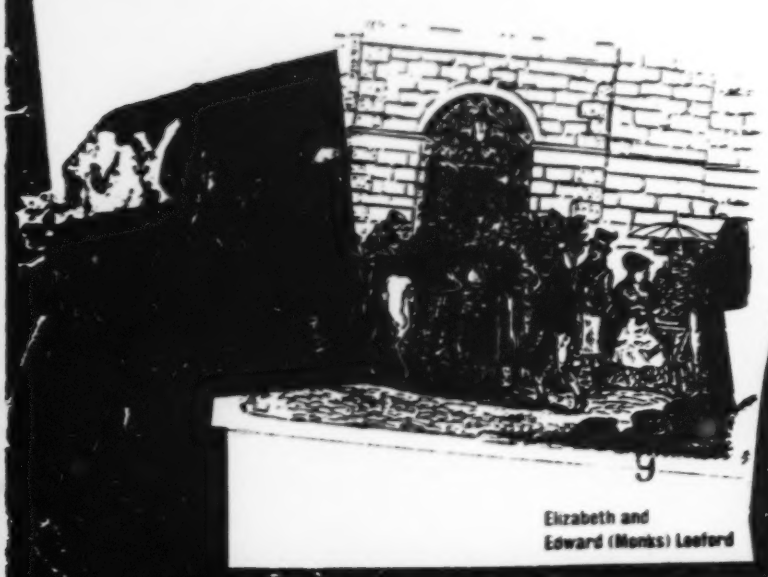
Before Viewing

This film adaptation of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* begins with a love story: the tale of Oliver's parents, Agnes Fleming and Edwin Leeford. The events in the film are set in motion by the obstacles these two "star-crossed lovers" face. Use the questions below to prepare students to identify and compare Victorian customs and attitudes toward marriage with those of their own culture and time.

1 In American culture, why do people marry? How do most individuals select their marriage partners?

2 How does our society view an "out-of-wedlock" birth? Adultery? How common is divorce in our culture? In what ways have our society's attitudes changed? [Ask students to interview parents and older adults to answer this question.]

Agnes Fleming



Elizabeth and Edward (Monks) Leeford

Post-Viewing Discussion

1 Ask students to describe the opening scenes of *Oliver Twist*: setting, mood, music, action, colors, dialogue. How does your impression of Agnes change when the scene moves from her death at the workhouse to the meadow scene with Edwin? How does your understanding of and feelings about the cliff scene change the second time you see it?

2 When she is carried into the workhouse in labor, Agnes is asked her name. "I've lost my name," she answers. What does she mean? What do names symbolize, or stand for, in this story? Where does Oliver get his name?

3 On the board, brainstorm a list of words to describe Edwin Leeford. Circle the positive words, underline the negative ones. Is he presented as a victim, a villain, or both? Explain. How is he viewed by each of the following: Agnes, Captain Fleming, Mr. Brownlow, Elizabeth Leeford? Whose view of Edwin Leeford is closest to your own?

4 How does the story of Agnes and Edwin offer a critique of Victorian marriage and morals? What do you think Dickens believed the basis of marriage should be? How would the story of Agnes and Edwin be different today? How might it be the same?

Post-Viewing Activities

1 Thinking back to the opening scene of Agnes on the cliff, write an interior monologue for her. What's going through her mind? What has led her to contemplate suicide and why does she refrain from doing so?

2 In Paris, Edward Leeford is eager to hear any message for him from his estranged father, Edwin. What does Edwin Leeford think of his son? Do you think he is a "bad seed," as his father fears, or a product of bad circumstances? What is his relationship with his mother? What effect does she have on him and on Edwin? Write a letter from Edward to his father in which he explains how he has become the man he is.

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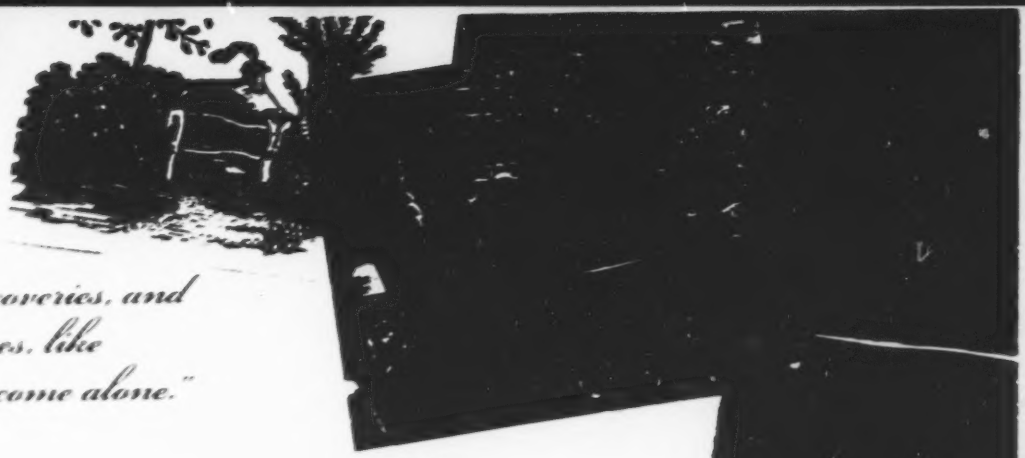
Episode II

"Containing fresh discoveries, and shewing that surprises, like misfortunes, seldom come alone."



Mrs. Mann

Thematic Focus:
Poverty, identity, and destiny

Before Viewing

The last section of Episode I provided a glimpse of a Victorian workhouse and the "baby farms" that housed orphaned infants in Victorian England. Copy and distribute "Down and Out in Victorian England" on pages 18 and 19. Then have students read the biography of Dickens on pages 16 and 17.

1 What was the philosophy behind workhouse relief for the poor? Why were families separated within the workhouse? Why were they fed meager rations?

2 What was the attitude of most middle-class Victorians toward people in their society who lived in poverty? What is our attitude today? Do we view the poor in our own nation in the same way as we view the poor in less developed countries? Why or why not?

3 What experience of poverty and working-class life did Dickens have? Look for how you think his experiences influenced his portrayal of poverty and criminality as you watch.

Post-Viewing Discussion

1 List the characters you met in Episode II who do not live in poverty. What does each character see when looking at Oliver? How does their judgment and treatment of Oliver reflect who they are, what they believe, and what their values are?

2 Recall or replay two scenes from the episode: 1) Oliver asks for "more" and is brought before the Board (about 3 minutes from the beginning), and 2) Oliver and Sowerberry visit the home of a poor woman who has died of starvation (about 12 minutes in). How do these scenes demonstrate the hypocrisy of those who devised and enforced the New Poor Law? How and why was poverty treated like a crime?

3 As portrayed in *Oliver Twist*, is the criminal underworld better or worse than the workhouse? What does Oliver find in his first days living in Fagin's den that he has never known before? Why do you think the screenwriter decided to make Fagin a magician? What do you think Dickens wanted his middle-class readers to understand about the world of London criminals and prostitutes? What does Dickens believe is the relationship between poverty and criminality? What do you think the relationship is today?

4 Why is Edward Leeford (Monks) looking for Oliver? What does he want Fagin to do? Has Edward changed since Episode I? How?

5 Dickens could have chosen to make Oliver the poor, orphaned son of a man and woman who were also poor, yet he did not. Why do you think he gave Oliver an upper-class background? Does it weaken or strengthen Dickens's social message about the nature of poverty and the poor?

Post-Viewing Activities

1 Write or enact a debate between a proponent of the New Poor Law and a Victorian-era reformer who opposed the law. Both voices should use the life of Oliver Twist as evidence for their arguments. To prepare, make sure students read "Down and Out in Victorian England" and do additional library and Web research (for suggested Web sites, see page 9).

2 Look for present-day articles about poverty, both in this country and others, in newspapers and periodicals. What attitudes, morals, and laws do these articles reflect? How would the article be different or the same if it had been written during the period of the New Poor Law?

3 Have students research poverty statistics for your community and compare these with national figures. What does "poverty" mean in your community? Does holding a full-time job necessarily mean that a person is above the poverty line? What social supports are available locally for people falling below or just above the poverty line?

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Episode III

"In which all is revealed..."

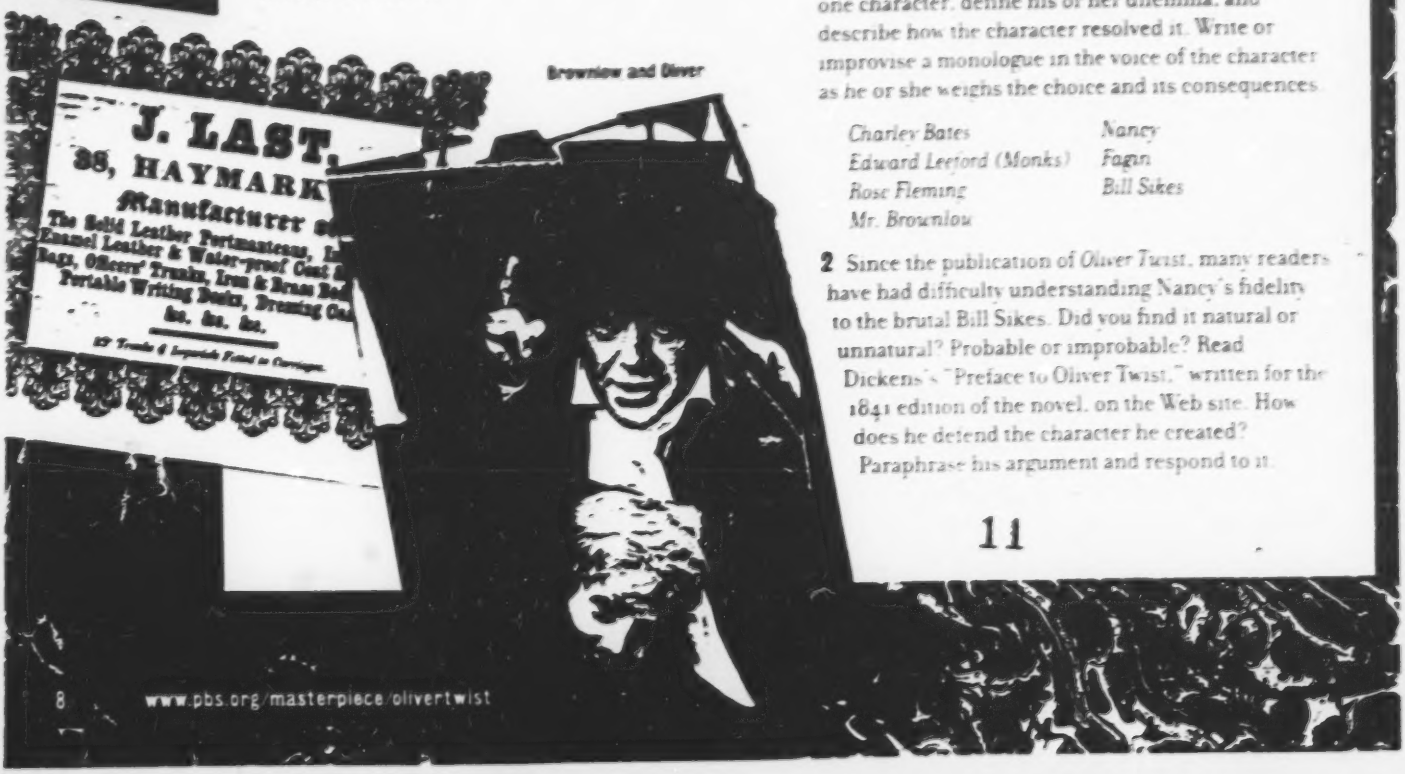
Thematic Focus:
Cowardice, courage, and redemption

Before Viewing

Episode III turns on the actions of Nancy and Mr. Brownlow, two characters from entirely different worlds who struggle to do what is right. Before its happy conclusion, *Oliver Twist* takes viewers through dark moments and difficult choices.

1 In this episode, Brownlow observes, "You can be for the good, or you can be for the bad. Or you can be miserably in between." Invite students to recall a time when they were faced with a difficult moral choice. Have students write about their thinking process and their decision in the context of Brownlow's observation.

2 The final episode is subtitled, "In which all is revealed...." As a class, make a list of the major plot lines that have been developed in the first two episodes (focusing on Oliver, Brownlow, Monks, Fagin, Nancy, and Sikes). (Students could use this as an opportunity to begin their Chain of Events graphic organizers mentioned on page 5.) Make a prediction about how each thread in the plot will be resolved by the end of the film.



Brownlow and Oliver

Post-Viewing Discussion

1 Why did Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin argue at the end of Episode II? Why does Brownlow come to his country house, and who does he find there? What does Brownlow learn about himself by helping Oliver?

2 Is Nancy a heroic figure? Why does she return to Bill? Have Dickens and the screenwriter made her motives understandable to you?

3 What did you learn about Edward Leeford in the scene in which he apologizes to Oliver? How is his life changed by his encounter with Oliver and Brownlow?

4 As they pass the gallows, Oliver asks Brownlow why Fagin is condemned for his crimes, yet Edward remains free. What answer does Brownlow give? What explanation would you have given Oliver?

5 What is revealed by the text of Edwin Leeford's letter to Agnes? Why do you think screenwriter Alan Bleasdale made Leeford's words the last lines spoken in the film?

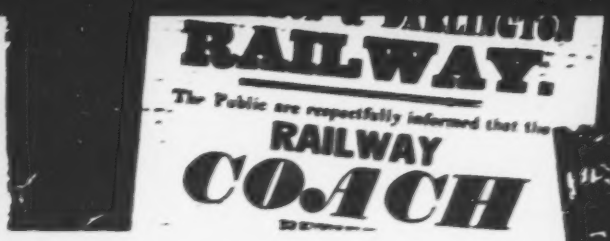
6 Introduce the concept of poetic justice. "In which virtue is rewarded and vice punished, often in an especially appropriate or ironic manner" (from *The American Heritage Dictionary*). Was poetic justice served in each main character's case?

Post-Viewing Activities

1 Each of the following characters faces a moral challenge or difficult choice in this episode. Select one character, define his or her dilemma, and describe how the character resolved it. Write or improvise a monologue in the voice of the character as he or she weighs the choice and its consequences.

Charley Bates	*Nancy*
Edward Leeford (Monks)	*Fagin*
Rose Fleming	*Bill Sikes*
Mr. Brownlow	

2 Since the publication of *Oliver Twist*, many readers have had difficulty understanding Nancy's fidelity to the brutal Bill Sikes. Did you find it natural or unnatural? Probable or improbable? Read Dickens's "Preface to Oliver Twist," written for the 1841 edition of the novel, on the Web site. How does he defend the character he created? Paraphrase his argument and respond to it.



Web Resources

The Web site for *Oliver Twist* provides extensive resources for both you and your students. The following are suggestions for some additional sites that you may want to visit, either to support your teaching of *Oliver Twist* and other Dickens or Victorian novels, or as support for student research assignments.

Synopsis of Oliver Twist
www.sprog.auc.dk/~riber/olisum.htm
If your students are not reading *Oliver Twist*, you may want to share with them this plot summary to help them better understand the changes made in the screenwriter.

Charles Dickens
www.helsinki.fi/kasv/nokol/dickens.html
This vast array of Dickens-related material—his life, family, work, homes, and more—was compiled by a Finnish scholar.

Charles Dickens's Gad's Hill Place
www.perryweb.com/Dickens/index.html
This eclectic Web site provides information about Dickens's home, Gad's Hill, as well as daily quotes, biographical information, crossword puzzles and character matches, online texts, and more.

David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page
www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/index.html
Compiled by a Dickens enthusiast, this site includes information about his work, illustrations, maps, a timeline, Dickens in America, Web links, and an alphabetical list of characters from Dickens's works.

Imaging Victorian England
www.stanford.edu/dept/english/victorian/dickens/marsh/main.htm
This Web site provides detailed descriptions of Dickens's London, with details about how it relates to his life and work. Among the images is a bottle of Warren Blacking Polish.

The Peel Web
http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/mbloy/peel/peelhome.htm
Named for Sir Robert Peel, a key Dickens-era reform legislator, the Peel Web provides important historical context, including information about political organizations, popular movements such as Chartism and trade unions, and economic affairs such as the Anti-Corn Law League and the Poor Law. Includes many primary source documents.

Toby Crackitt, left. Oliver and fellow orphans, right.

The Victorian Web
http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/victov.html
The Victorian Web offers varied information on the Victorian era, including political and social history, authors, technology, philosophy, religion, science, visual arts, design, and more.

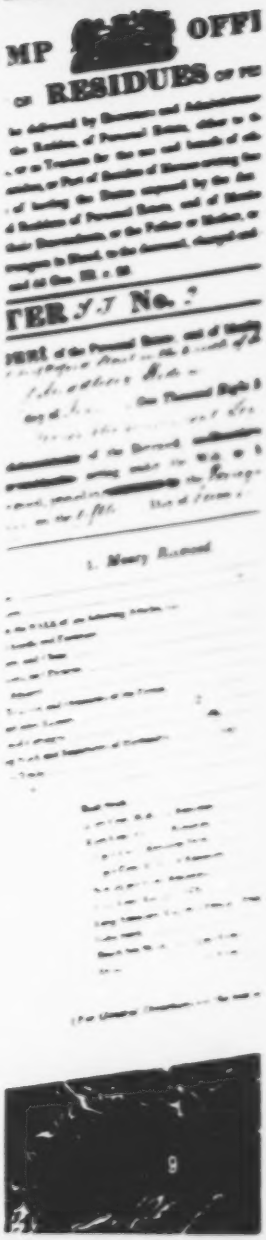
Victorian Serial Publishing
www.eiu.edu/~multilit/English5005-01/bethholde-brandtserialr.html
This student paper gives detailed information about serial publishing, the reasons behind it, and the effects on plot and the publishing industry.

The Poor Laws of England
www.hazlitt.org/e-texts/poverty/ch7.html
Excerpted from Henry Hazlitt's 1975 book, *Conquest of Poverty*, this chapter provides information about the Poor Laws, including extensive excerpts from the 1832 Commission Report.

The Victorian Poorhouse
humwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/OMF/spencer.html
This article describes the realities and conditions in Victorian poorhouses.

Graphic Organizers
www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/actbank/torganiz.htm
www.graphic.org/brainst.html
These sites provide examples of a number of graphic organizers for classroom use.

Web-Based Teachers' Guides
www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cy912.html
These "exterguides" from SCORE (Schools of California Online Resources for Educators) offer teachers' guides for a range of ages and literary works based on California's language arts content standards. Guides for other subjects are available at the home page: www.score.k12.ca.us.



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After-Viewing Activities

The Writer's Purpose

1 In his preface to *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens lays out for his readers the organizing theme of his novel: "I wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last." Take Dickens's statement of purpose as your topic sentence and extend his explanation, writing or speaking in his voice: How did the story of *Oliver Twist* demonstrate your faith in the ultimate triumph of goodness?

2 What are the other messages and themes of *Oliver Twist*? What did Dickens want his readers to learn and understand? As a class, briefly review how the novel touches on each topic below and brainstorm more themes for the list. Then, have students choose one of these themes and, in the voice of the author, explain how the story explores it, beginning, as Dickens did, with the phrase "I wished to show..."

- the New Poor Law
- money and materialism
- charity and love
- woman as nurturer
- hypocrisy
- courage and cowardice
- "the best and worst shades of our common nature"
- poetic justice

Exploring Character

1 Write a one-paragraph description of three of the major characters in the film: Agnes Fleming, Edwin Leeford, and Elizabeth Leeford. In Dickens's novel, these three do not appear until Chapter 51, where their history is briefly given by Monks (Edward Leeford) and Mr. Brownlow in less than four pages. "I couldn't have written any of them," says screenwriter Alan Bleasdale, "without having the scent of them off the page from Dickens." Read Dickens's text found at the Web site, then reread your character descriptions. How much material did Bleasdale have to work with? In the text, where do you detect "the scent" of the characters?

2 Screenwriter Alan Bleasdale said of Fagin, "He does things which we know are morally wrong, but because he does them with real charm, we don't judge him in the same way." How did you respond to Fagin? Recall a scene that demonstrates Fagin's "charm." Literature is rich with characters who are morally flawed, yet appealing. With a partner, name four or five characters from other books or films who fit this profile. Without disclosing the character's name, write a brief description of each character on an index card. Use the cards for a character identification game: players get a bonus point for convincing a judge that Bleasdale's words about Fagin apply to the character on the card.

Serialization

1 Imagine you are Dickens, writing furiously month to month to meet a printing deadline for the next installment of your serialized novel. How difficult is it to keep control of a complex plot? Try it yourself over a five-day period. On day one, create a catchy title and write a plot summary of your first chapter, introducing at least six characters. Submit another plot summary each day for the rest of the week. Trade your five-part serial story with a classmate and act as editors for one another's work. Are there inconsistencies in the story? Are there loose threads that need tying up? Characters left hanging? If you had a chance to revise, would you begin the story in the same way? What special skills does a writer need to be able to compose a serialized novel under the pressure of a monthly deadline? Find out more about serialization at "Stay Tuned for Our Next Episode" on the Web site. You may also wish to follow Stephen King's progress as he writes his next serialized novel and distributes it via the Web (www.stephenking.com).

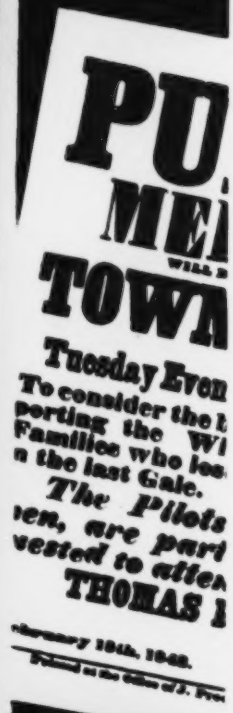
The Filmmaker's Art

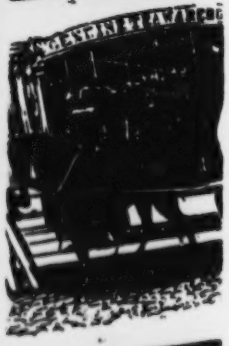
1 Select and replay a scene from the film that is at least two minutes in length. Assign students a single film technique or directorial choice to observe.

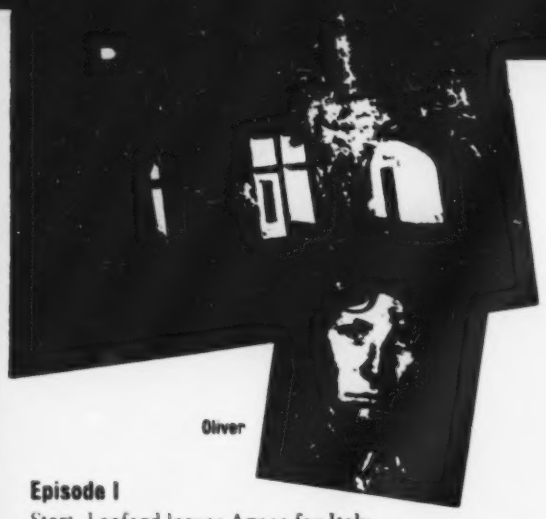
- scenery (interior set or exterior setting)
- costumes and makeup
- lighting
- editing (cuts)
- camera angles

Share student notes on techniques. Then view another scene and evaluate how the scene's effects (emotion or tone, dramatic moments, humor, suspense, plot advancement) are created by the series of specific choices the filmmakers made.

2 In his serialized novel, Charles Dickens juggled two or three locations and plot lines simultaneously. From month to month he would move freely between them as the plot advanced. The film version borrows this idea, but moves between scenes at even shorter intervals. View one of the segments suggested (each about ten minutes long), and ask students to count how many scenes the filmmakers juggle, and how many cuts between scenes are in the segment. Then discuss: what is the effect of editing the film in this way?







Oliver

Episode I

Start: Leeford leaves Agnes for Italy (around 30 minutes in)

End: Brownlow looks at Agnes's portrait

Episode III

Start: Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin (about 19 minutes in)

End: Brownlow at the piano

3 Have students experience the role of director by creating a prompt book for a scene from the film. Refer students to the Web feature "From Text to Screen," and have them choose one of the scenes to work with. After printing out the script, students should describe the physical scene they are creating and annotate the script by providing stage and line delivery directions, cutting lines as they see fit, and determining the overall message of the scene.

From *Oliver Twist* to *Great Expectations*

Pairing this film with a reading of his masterpiece 24 years later gives students an opportunity to track the consistent themes in Dickens's work and evaluate his development as a writer.

1 How are Oliver and young Pip alike? How do Fagin and Sikes compare with Magwitch? The novelist and critic Graham Greene argues that "only late in his career did Dickens learn to write realistically of human beings." Do you agree or disagree with Greene? Use characters from *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* to support your position.

2 In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens satirizes the notion that the poor are immoral and criminal by nature. "I have great faith in the Poor," he wrote. What is the message of *Great Expectations* about poverty, wealth, and good moral character? Which novel makes Dickens's case for the poor more convincingly? Why?

3 What similarities in plot did you notice between *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*? The earlier novel was criticized for the unevenness of its plot and its reliance on coincidence. Does the construction of the plot show that *Great Expectations* is the work of a more mature, seasoned writer? (You may want to read the essay on adapting *Oliver Twist* on pages 14–15.)

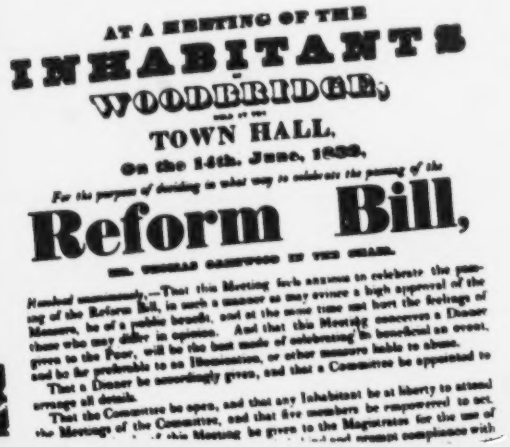
Historical Context

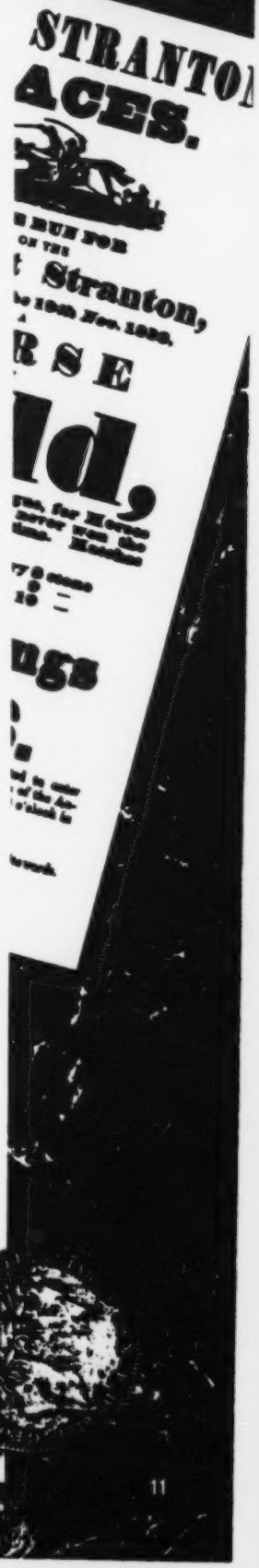
1 What is the responsibility of the state to its poorest citizens? What should the state require of those who receive its aid? In Dickens's time, both these questions were hotly debated. In our own time, the argument continues.

Use Web or library resources to learn about the Welfare Reform Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1995. Then read "Down and Out in Victorian England" on pages 18 and 19 and do further Web and library research about the New Poor Law. How does the Welfare Reform Act compare with the New Poor Law? Make a two-column chart and answer the following questions:

- What did the bill's backers believe was wrong with the old system of welfare or relief?
- What were the provisions of the new law?
- Was the new law intended to discourage reliance on government relief, create opportunities for work, or both?
- How did the bill address the needs of children in poverty?
- Why was the new system criticized?
- What did the bill assume about the causes of poverty?

Other historic–contemporary issues you could explore and contrast in a similar manner are views on child labor (and the development of child labor laws) and the development of criminal gangs.


AT A MEETING OF THE
INHABITANTS
OF
WOODBRIDGE,
IN THE
TOWN HALL,
On the 14th. June, 1832,
For the purpose of deciding in what way to celebrate the passing of the
Reform Bill,
THE REVEREND CRESWOOD IN THE CHAIR.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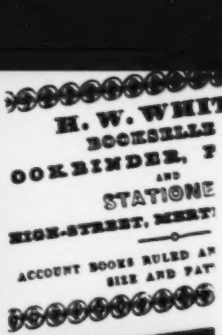


Looking at Film

NAME A BOOK you have read that could easily be made into a film. Identify a book that would be very difficult to adapt into a screenplay. What are the differences between these two books? What are the challenges filmmakers face when they set out to bring a novel to the screen?

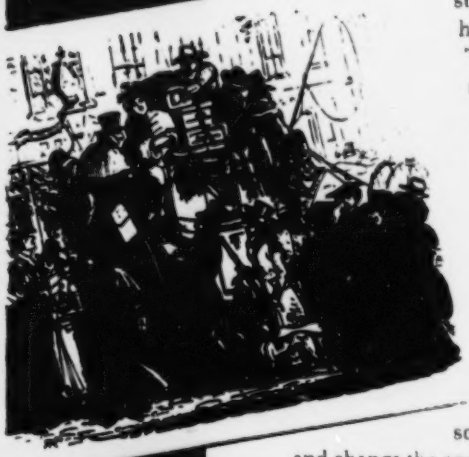
Screenwriter Alan Bleasdale, who dramatized *Oliver Twist*, was delighted to have the opportunity to adapt a Dickens novel. But he faced more than a few challenges. Copy and distribute "From Novel to Film" on pages 14 and 15 to help students understand some of the choices he made.

Part I: Adapting the Plot

Discussion

1 What were the problems Bleasdale identified with the plot of *Oliver Twist*?

2 *Oliver Twist* was published as a serial novel (see the information about serialization on the Web site.) How does Bleasdale think this may have contributed to the plot?



3 What is the novel's "back story"? What did Bleasdale have to do in order to bring the "back story" to the front of his screenplay?

4 In the novel, the reader does not learn Oliver's identity until late in the story. Bleasdale lets the viewer in on the secret in the first episode. If there is no mystery for the viewer, where does the dramatic tension come from?

5 Often in films, screenwriters adapt the plots and change the endings of previously published books. What do you think about that? What are the rights of the original author? Are there limits to how much something can or should be changed? How would you feel about this adaptation if you were Dickens?

Rose Fleming

Activities

1 Look up the definition of "coincidence." Write a short personal narrative about a coincidence you experienced. Would this narrative work as an episode in a novel, play, or film? Why do you think the producer and the screenwriter of *Oliver Twist* agreed that a plot based on a series of coincidences was "a big problem for a modern audience"?

Part II: Developing Characters

Discussion

1 What tools and techniques can a writer use to develop characters in a novel?

2 Read aloud or distribute a passage of narration from the novel listed below, which can be found in the Web-based version of the teacher's guide (or in your own copy of *Oliver Twist*). What can a filmmaker do to replace the information about character and setting that is lost when a narrator is eliminated? *(Answers could include using dialogue, the actors' abilities to communicate emotions and inner thoughts, scenery, costumes, sound.)*

Suggested passages:

- Oliver and Sowerberry in pauper's home. Chapter 5, beginning "They walked on, for some time..." to paragraph ending "so like the rats he had seen outside."
- Fagin's den. Chapter 8, beginning "Oliver, groping his way with one hand..." to paragraph ending "...youths who offered them."
- Introduction of Sikes. Chapter 13, beginning "The man who growled out these words..."

Activities

1 Reverse the screenwriting process. Take a scene from the film and rewrite it as narration and dialogue, using a page from any Dickens novel as a model for style. Start with a clip from the film or a portion of script available at the Web site in the "From Text to

Screen" section. How did you replace with prose what you saw and heard in the film?

2 Go through a list of the major characters in *Oliver Twist* and assign a rating, 1–5, for how completely or convincingly each character is developed in the film. As a class, discuss your top-rated characters and explain the basis for your rating.

Now reread Bleasdale's comments about character development in the film. Which major characters in the film were minor characters in the novel? Which characters did Alan Bleasdale wish to alter, and why? Are your top-rated film characters those who are closest to the pages of the novel, or the modified or newly drawn characters?

Part III: Dialogue

Activity

In the "From Text to Screen" feature on the Web site, students can read excerpts from the text of Dickens's novel and link to the film script (and actual video) for the same scene. Study the pages side by side and examine how Alan Bleasdale used and adapted Dickens's dialogue for his screenplay.

Discuss Bleasdale's adaptation in the context of these different elements:

- **Length:** Has Dickens's original dialogue been shortened or expanded? Speculate why Bleasdale made the changes he did.
- **Language:** Specifically, how has the wording been changed? What do you think Bleasdale's aim was? Does the new dialogue have the same tone? The same meaning?
- **Genre:** To adapt a novel for the screen, is some change in dialogue always necessary? Why? Is there speech that works in a novel that doesn't translate to the screen, and vice versa? Where?
- **Audience:** Bleasdale adapted the novel to make it more appealing to a modern audience. Identify specific points where he did this.

Part IV: Reading vs. Viewing

Discussion

1 What is your favorite book? Has a film ever been made of this title? Have you seen it?

- If you have, tell about your reaction to the film. Did the images and presentation of the characters match up with the vision and understanding you took away from reading the book? How were the plot, characters, dialogue, and setting adapted for film?

Bumble and Sowerberry

- If you have not seen a film version, would you like to? What advice would you offer a screenwriter and a director on how to preserve, on screen, what is best about the book? What is the biggest challenge the filmmakers will face?

2 Did you ever see a movie that was made from a book you hadn't read, and then go back and read the novel? What was your reaction to the book? Did your feelings about the movie change after you'd read the book? How much do you think the order in which you experience something—novel first, then movie, or movie first, then novel—affects what you believe is the best "presentation" of the story?

Activity

1 Write the screenplay for the opening scene of a film based on your favorite book. What will be the opening shot? Which character or characters will appear first? Write the opening dialogue or voiceover narration. Include notes on casting suggestions, costumes, music.

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From Novel to Film

Screenwriter Alan Bleasdale cherished an ambition to bring a Dickens novel to the screen for 25 years. As a teenager he read Dickens's novels, and loved them all. "When ITV rang and asked if I'd dramatize *Oliver Twist* I said yes immediately," says Alan. "I'd been waiting 25 years for this phone call. When I put the phone down I did cartwheels around the house." But he admits he was daunted by the enormity of the task ahead of him.

"I was scared, because with Dickens you're entering the playground that basically consists of Shakespeare, Dickens, and Tolstoy. Suddenly I was playing with the big boys. Dickens is undoubtedly one of the greatest writers who ever lived and facing up to him was hard to do."

So, in the summer of 1997 Bleasdale sat down to reread *Oliver Twist*, Dickens's most enduringly popular novel. "*Oliver Twist* was one of the first I ever read, so I must've been only about 13. Reading it nearly 40 years later was a very interesting experience. I'm still stunned by what an incredible piece of work it is and have to keep reminding myself that this was basically Dickens's first major attempt at a novel and that he was only in his mid 20s when he wrote it. It is quite an astounding achievement."

Turning a novel written in 1837 into a television serial for today presented Alan with major challenges. He explains: "Obviously I read it a second time round with a different eye than when I was barely a teenager. There were three things that I was anxious about. Firstly, the level of coincidence that exists in the story; then the perhaps accidental anti-Semitism in relation to Fagin and finally the occasional blasts of sentimentality.

"These are areas that I thought might be problematic for a modern television audience and it is a testimony to Dickens's brilliance that despite these difficulties the book remains a real page-turner even today.

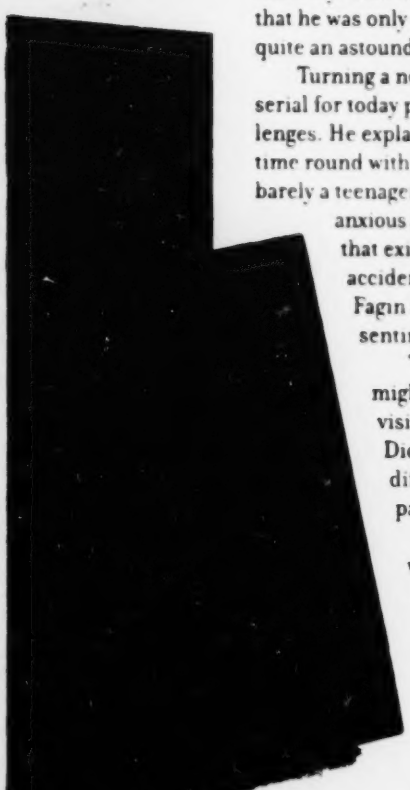
"What I think he did, because of writing in monthly installments, was literally make it up as he went along. By the end he'd painted himself into a corner and the only way out was to do this back story—of about 4 or 5 pages at the end—where he explains everything at incredible speed. I suddenly realized that this rather problematic part of the novel was actually my solution. By beginning with this material, the audience would understand the characters' motivation throughout and whilst writing it, I could be plucking up the courage to get to the point where I enter the same arena as Dickens."

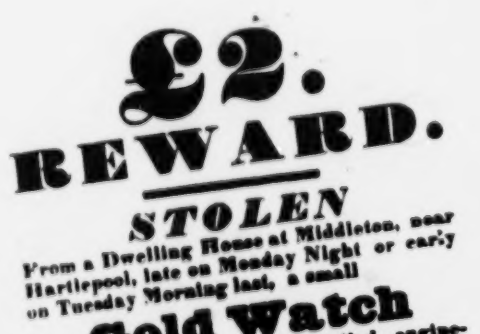
Bleasdale set to work, unraveling the story backwards. The result is two hours of drama before young Oliver Twist even takes his first breath. The dramatization tells the story of how Oliver is conceived and born out of wedlock to Agnes Fleming in a workhouse, and how he becomes an orphan.

"The world I've created before Oliver is born is still Dickens's world, but inevitably because it was only a few pages in the original novel and I've turned it into a couple of hours drama, I've developed it considerably. Some of the book's minor characters, like Oliver's father Edwin Leeford and his wife Elizabeth, were fascinating people to me, but they were really only mentioned in passing or appeared as walk-ons. Because Dickens was writing at such a furious pace and was making it up as he went along, certain things just get thrown away. Genius that he was, he just kept on writing and threw those pages over his shoulder. So I've followed along behind him, picking them up."

Having put the plot line in place, Bleasdale was determined to overthrow many of the cliches often associated with Dickens. One of the areas where this is demonstrated is in the characterization and casting of Oliver.

"Oliver experienced dreadful cruelty, and Dickens was ruthless in showing that to his readers and I'm really only intent on showing the audience the same thing. But I just don't believe that a boy who had Oliver's upbringing until the age of 10, a boy who'd experienced such hardship, would be

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REWARD.
STOLEN
From a Dwelling House at Middleton, near Hartlepool, late on Monday Night or early on Tuesday Morning last, a small
Gold Watch
and Gold Chain, with a scrolled engine-

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quite the boy Dickens describes. It was as if his gentility had never been touched and bruised, but I just don't buy that.

"Our Oliver is sweet, has great decency and strength, but he's been dragged up dreadfully and it's a great compliment to his inner strength that he survives as he does. So I've tried to give the character a toughness, a hardness and a sense of determination."

Adaptations to Oliver Twist

Bleasdale's Episode 1 tells the story of Oliver's parents—Agnes Fleming and Edwin Leeford—who in the novel appear almost as an afterthought at the end of his story, where Dickens quickly ties up all the loose ends. Bleasdale puts them up front and tells their story in much greater detail.

As in the novel, the television dramatization opens with the frail Agnes Fleming giving birth to Oliver Twist in the workhouse in a small town. Bleasdale's town is by the sea and is called Bruntmarsh. In the novel, Dickens gave the town the fictitious name of Mudfog, but it was most probably based on Chatham in Kent.

After Oliver's birth, Bleasdale then goes back in time to cover Agnes's story. It details her family relationships, her love affair with Edwin Leeford, her resulting pregnancy, her departure from her home town, her journey to the town of Oliver's birth, and her death. In Dickens's novel Agnes is described simply as "a good looking girl…found lying in the street:—she had walked some distance, for her shoes were worn to pieces; but where she came from, or where she was going to, nobody knows." Bleasdale's Agnes is a fully rounded character.

AT THE END of Dickens's novel, it is revealed that when Edwin Leeford meets Agnes, he is already married to, but separated from, an older woman (Elizabeth), this marriage having been arranged by their families. Dickens hints that Elizabeth is an unappealing woman, but we learn little more about her. Bleasdale has created a whole hideous character for Elizabeth Leeford and also a much more intricate portrait of her disturbed son Edward Leeford, otherwise known as Monks.

Bleasdale's character of Edwin Leeford is fleshed out considerably. In Dickens, he is a shadowy figure, whereas Bleasdale has created a careless, charming fellow, who, despite his decent intentions toward Agnes and others, is actually rather weak. In Bleasdale's version we witness how Leeford travels to Rome in order to receive his inheritance from his wealthy Uncle Richard. Elizabeth Leeford is determined to get her hands on this money and she therefore pursues him. In the novel, Dickens simply states that Edwin Leeford dies in Rome the day after Elizabeth Leeford arrives in the city, without any detail of what happened between the two of them. Bleasdale has written in a dramatic encounter between husband and wife.

Once Leeford is dead, Elizabeth and Monks discover they only inherit his money if they can get rid of Agnes. Bleasdale has therefore written in their search for Agnes. Monks's failed attempt to murder her, and their subsequent mission to seek out Oliver and discredit him in the eyes of Mr. Brownlow, the guardian of Leeford's will.

The character and role of Mr. Brownlow is developed considerably. In Bleasdale's version, he is not only Edwin's closest friend, but also the guardian of his will. It is therefore to him that Mrs. Leeford and Monks have to discredit young Oliver. To do this, they enlist the help of Fagin and he decides to send Oliver with Bill Sikes to burgle Brownlow's country house. The encounters between Oliver and Brownlow in the Bleasdale version are therefore planned, rather than being a series of coincidences.

Although the character of Mrs. Mann exists in Dickens's novel, Bleasdale's Mrs. Mann is actually based on another *Oliver Twist* character, Mrs. Corney. Because she is part of a double act with Mr. Bumble, Bleasdale switched their names around. "I couldn't cope with Bumble and Corney—sounds like a very bad couple of third-rate comedians in the 1940s."

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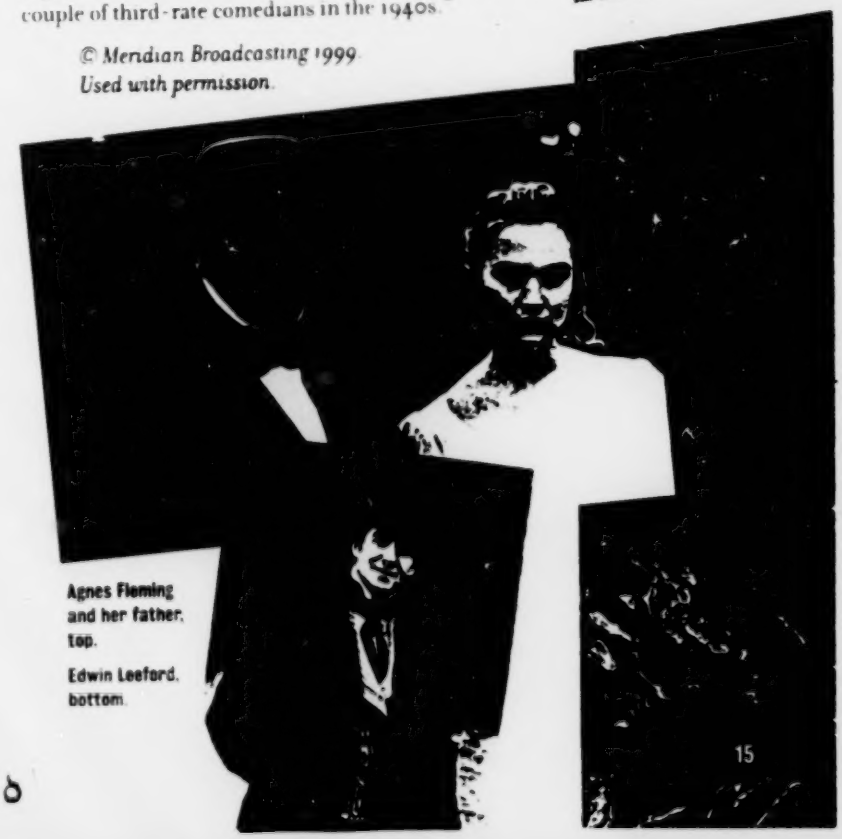

Agnes Fleming and her father, top.

Edwin Leeford, bottom.

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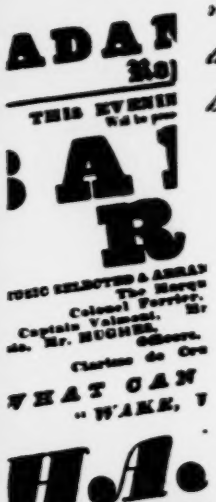
Who Was Charles Dickens?

He was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation. The boy had no friends to care for, or to care for him. The regret of no recent separation was fresh in his mind: the absence of no loved and well-remembered face sank heavily into his heart.

—*Oliver Twist*, Chapter 5



THIS DESCRIPTION of *Oliver Twist* may also capture the haunting childhood of its author, Charles Dickens. Feeling alone in the world at the age of 12, Dickens saw firsthand the horrors Victorian England cast upon the poor—particularly the young. Frightful living conditions and cruel work situations were the order of the day.

Writing saved Dickens, both financially and emotionally. As an adult, he set his life's work on exposing social ills, using his boundless talents and energies to spin engaging, poignant tales from the streets. He also introduced new accessible forms of publishing that proved immensely popular and influential. Dickens's keen observational style, precise description, and sharp social criticism have kept his large body of work profoundly enduring.

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born February 7, 1812, near Portsmouth, England, the second of eight children. Dickens's father was employed as a minor civil servant in the Naval Pay Office, a job that required the family to move a number of times. The Dickenses spent many of Charles's early years fairly pleasantly in Chatham but made their final move to a miserable part of London. Charles's father lived beyond his means, and floundered financially.

Two days after Charles turned 12, his father was thrown into Marshalsea Debtor's Prison. Charles was already working at the Warren Blacking Company, pasting labels on bottles of shoe polish; he'd left school at age 10 to help support the family. Now he was on his own, while the rest of the family roomed in a jail cell with the elder Dickens. Young Dickens lived in a miserable lodging house and worked long hours in squalid conditions, supervised by cruel masters. Though Dickens lived away from his family for only four months (his father came into an unexpected inheritance), the traumatic experience shaped the rest of his life. He came to believe that money and position in Victorian England meant everything. His early encounters with such grave conditions gave Dickens rare and deep insight into life's inequalities and greatly deepened his writing.

Dickens soon returned to school where he excelled. He loved reading, especially adventure stories and magical tales. At this time, Dickens began submitting "penny-a-line" material (whereby writers were paid per line for their work) to the *British Press*. Such submissions largely took the form of factual information about fires, accidents, and police reports.

His parents could not afford to complete his education, and at 15 Dickens reluctantly left school to begin the tedious routine of a law clerk. Shorthand played an odd but key role in his career. While clerking, he taught himself this skill and immediately parlayed his newfound knowledge into a job as a newspaper reporter. Dickens left drudgery behind for good, finding the excitement and intellectual stimulation he'd been looking for in writing.

DICKENS FIRST WORKED at the *Mirror of Parliament*, founded by his uncle, and gained a reputation for accuracy, quickness, and sharp observation. He covered the Reform Bill debates, legislation that extended voting rights to the previously disenfranchised, an experience that both cemented his commitment to reform and at the same time instilled in him a lifelong suspicion of reformers. *Mirror of Parliament* did not pay its writers when the government was in recess. At such times, Dickens relied on freelance court reporting for various newspapers such as the liberal daily *Morning Chronicle*, where he soon took a staff position. Such work sharpened his ear for conversational speech and class mannerisms, which he called on later to portray characters with remarkable realism.

At this time, Dickens also started publishing tales and sketches of street life under the pseudonym "Boz" in periodicals such as *Monthly Magazine*, *Bell's Weekly Magazine*, and *Morning Chronicle*. They were immensely popular and were ultimately collected in two books, *Sketches by Boz* and *Sketches by Boz II*. These sketches set Dickens's reputation as a *flaneur*, the French-derived literary term for "connoisseur of street life."

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Book publishers Edward Chapman and William Hall were so impressed with *Sketches by Boz* that in 1836 they asked Dickens to write a series of stories to accompany illustrations by Robert Seymour, one of England's most popular comic artists. Their plan was for Dickens to write 20 monthly installments that they would sell for one shilling each. Dickens's friends warned that such a publication mode might cheapen his reputation. Up until then, serials were used largely for inexpensive reprints of classics or trivial nonfiction. Dickens found just the opposite of these predictions. Known as *The Pickwick Papers*, the serial was enormously well received both critically and popularly, and made Dickens a celebrity at the age of 24. The first run sold 400 copies; the last run sold 40,000. All of Dickens's future novels would appear in serial installments, setting a new Victorian trend in publishing.

Dickens used his first payment of 29 shillings from *The Pickwick Papers* to marry Catherine Hogarth, with whom he would eventually have ten children. Dickens idolized Catherine's younger sister, Mary, who is thought to be the model for Rose in *Oliver Twist*. Mary's untimely death at age 17 greatly affected him.

In 1837, Dickens began editing a monthly called *Bentley's Miscellany*, a collection of fiction, humor, and other features published by Richard Bentley. In the second issue, Dickens began installments of his first novel, *Oliver Twist*. The book was largely an indictment of the New Poor Law, legislation that Dickens felt institutionalized ill-treatment of society's least fortunate. Bentley put out the book in three volumes in 1838.

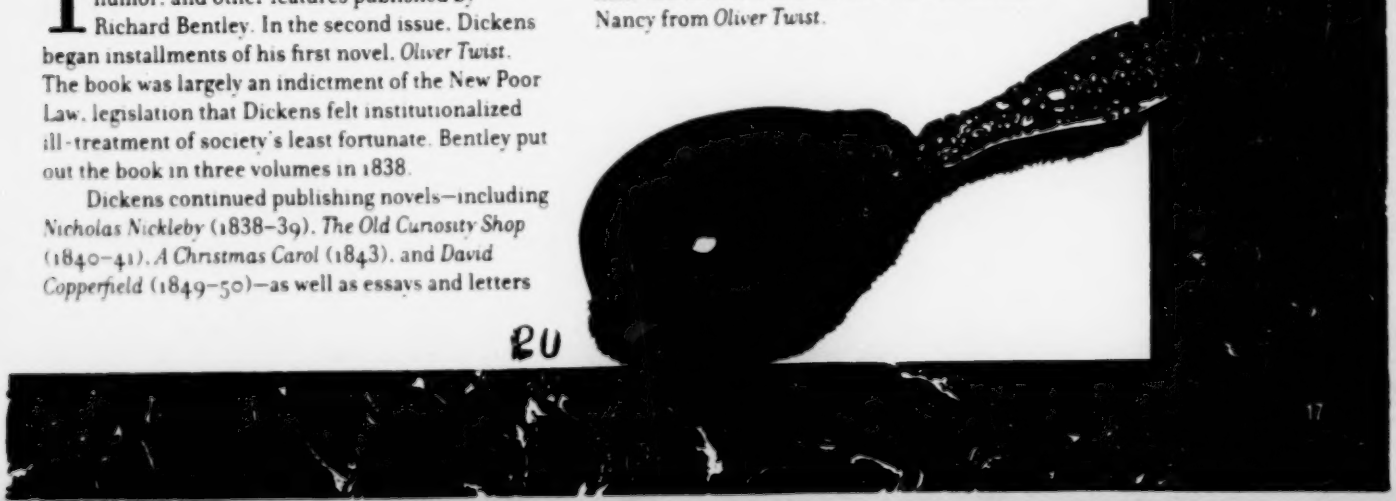
Dickens continued publishing novels—including *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and *David Copperfield* (1849–50)—as well as essays and letters to newspapers regarding social reform. In 1842, he visited America for the first time and shocked his hosts by denouncing slavery. He published *American Notes* upon his return to England, criticizing many aspects of American life and setting off a furor among Americans. Dickens depicted his low opinion of American manners in his 1842–43 novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

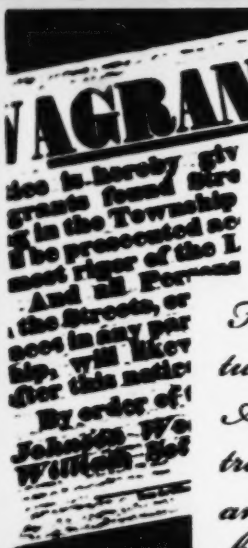
Dickens had used humor wonderfully to liven up the dark truths of his novels; in the 1840s he refined his style, widening his range with literary devices such as symbolism. In *Bleak House*, for example, he uses the toxic London fog to symbolize society's oppressive treatment of the downtrodden, his familiar theme. Dickens still offered funny, irreverent characters and situations, but now his tone was somewhat bitter, often taking the form of biting satire.

Dickens always had an interest in theater, and later in his career, he took great pleasure in producing and acting in amateur dramas. He collaborated with author Wilkie Collins on a play called *The Frozen Deep*, which his theatrical company performed for Queen Victoria in 1857. That same year, Dickens left his wife for actress Ellen Ternan. Around this time, Dickens also began to give public readings for pay, throughout Europe and America.

Dickens continued editing periodicals, beginning the weekly *Household Words* in 1850, which featured installments of *Hard Times*, among other works. In 1859, he began a new weekly titled *All the Year Round*, where *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and the unfinished *Mystery of Edwin Drood* appeared in serialized segments.

Dickens's final days were spent at his home Gad's Hill, an estate he'd admired as a child. He continued his public readings in London. On June 8, 1870, he had a stroke after a full day's work and died the next day. Some of his friends claimed his death was hastened by the public readings he gave of the final murderous scene between Bill Sikes and Nancy from *Oliver Twist*.





Down and Out in Victorian England

How much is conveyed in those two short words—"The Parish!" And with how many tales of distress and misery, of broken fortune and ruined hopes, too often of unrelieved wretchedness and successful knavery are they associated!

—from *Sketches by Boz*

So Charles Dickens described the Victorian parish, the British local government unit responsible for administering to the neighborhood's poor. The system was a miserable one, cruelly and purposefully inadequate at aiding society's least fortunate. The Victorian attitude toward the poor—one of shame—was largely to blame for this harsh treatment of society's downtrodden.

Victorian Morals and the Poor

The Industrial Age and the financial opportunities surrounding it led to a rapidly growing middle class in early 19th-century Britain. Previously, the aristocratic upper class—one that scorned working for a living—dictated economic and social influence. Now the bourgeoisie, including factory owners, managers, and purveyors of new services, wanted its place in society and needed to legitimize labor. They put forth a new ideal of work as moral virtue: God loved those who helped themselves, while "burdens on the public" were sinful and weak. This attitude validated the middle class by giving it someone to look down on.

Subsequently, welfare in Dickens's time was based on deterrence rather than support. Parish workhouses, the last resort for the homeless poor, were made as miserable as possible to discourage reliance on public assistance. Upon entering, inmates were stripped, searched, washed, given shapeless striped clothing to wear, and shorn of hair—in short, they were treated like criminals. Husbands and wives were separated into men's and women's quarters to "avert breeding." Mothers were taken away from children, to end "negative influences" on the young. Brothers and sisters were kept apart to avoid the "natural" inclination of the poor toward incest. After inmates were split up by age and sex, no health-related separation took place: the ill, insane, and able-bodied all lived together.

Meals were purposely inadequate, consisting mainly of single pints of gruel, a few ounces of bread, and water. Rooms measuring 20 feet long accommodated upwards of 30 people. Most inmates shared a bed. Heating was overlooked; often a block of rooms shared but one fireplace. Work involved back-breaking labor such as stone splitting, mill driving (on treadmills), bone crushing (for fertilizer), and heavy housework. The least able-bodied—the old, the sick, and the very young—suffered most of all.

The workhouse was administered by unpaid bureaucrats, headed by the beadle, an elected official. These civil servants treated workhouse residents with scorn and cruelty, reminding them with Biblical passages how lucky they were ("Blessed are the poor...").

The Poor Laws

Parishes were first instituted with the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601, which organized tax-collected assistance. The poor were divided up into two groups: the "impotent" (the sick and elderly, those classed "would work but couldn't") and the "able-bodied" (thought of as "could work but wouldn't"). The impotent were given outdoor, or out-of-almshouse, relief, while the able-bodied were brutally beaten to "right" their paths. Not all parishes were the same: some didn't have almshouses, and others were known for kinder treatment. To prevent droves of paupers from inundating the parishes with better arrangements, the 1662 Settlement Act stated that people had to prove "settlement" before receiving relief from a parish. Proof consisted of birth in the parish, marriage (for women), or working in the parish for a year and a day. Labor contracts were often made for 364 days to prevent settlement rights.

The 1782 Gilbert's Act changed some conditions for the better. This act allowed parishes to join together in building poorhouses and to share expenses. In 1795, the Speenhamland System, another reform named for the Berkshire village of Speen where it began, was predicated on the idea that "the present state of the poor requires further assistance than has generally been given them."

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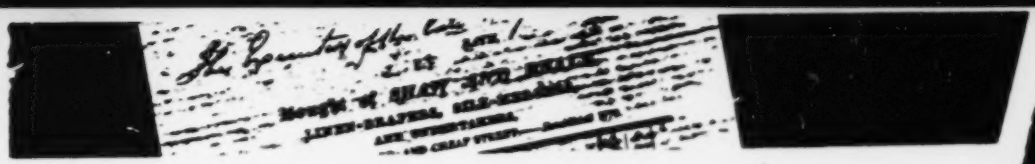


Disastrous harvests and growing population stirred fears among the ruling class that the peasants might revolt as they had in France: thus, allowances were initiated in Speen. Laborers received subsistence relief according to income, price of bread, and number of children in the family. This system spread quickly through the south of England, most heavily in what were known as the "Swing" counties, a particularly impoverished part of the country. The Speenhamland System is believed to have saved countless families in the Swing counties.

Unfortunately, a recession in 1815 and more industrialization led to further unemployment. Riots and poaching became the rule of the day. Between 1824 and 1830, crime in rural areas increased 30 percent. The Swing counties saw riots come to a head in 1830. Rabble-rousing journalist William Cobbett wrote a blistering article in the November 27, 1830, *Political Register* blaming the Swing riots on hunger and the poor laws.

The Poor Law Commission of 1832

An 1832 Commission was established to review the poor laws. Twenty-six investigators visited about 3,000 parishes, each official believing outdoor relief or allowances harmful to the poor. Britain at this time was divided into 15,000 parishes, and with no annual trends compiled, a national picture was not readily available. Commissioners were also influenced by the economist Thomas Robert Malthus, quite popular at this time, who had stated in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) that population would increase faster than food supplies. War and disease were necessary to kill off the extra population, unless people limited their offspring.

A questionnaire was also sent out, with only 10 percent of parishes replying. The data collected from the questionnaires were not reliable: badly phrased questions didn't distinguish between family allowances on wages and wage subsidies, and the lack of responses precluded a random sampling. The Commission concluded from the questionnaires that, as a rule, family allowances led to bigger families. Commissioners agreed that the old Poor Law was too expensive and wasteful.

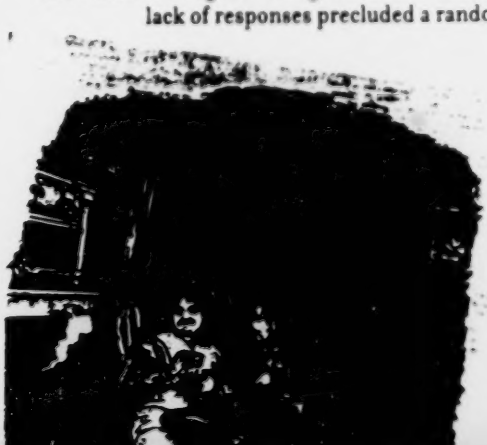
Results compiled by the Commission resulted in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. This act took power out of the hands of local parishioners and gave it to elected officials representing a central authority and middle-class values. It also took away relief from the poor outside government institutions —it was either the workhouse or nothing. These harsh changes were aimed at the able-bodied poor, but hit the infirm, old, and very young much harder. The New Poor Law also made mothers of illegitimate children responsible for the child's support.

Child Labor Laws

In less rural environs, industrialization led to a need for cheap labor. Lenient labor laws made children a prime source of workers. The desperately impoverished often sent their children off to factories, mines, and workshops. Parish officials, too, sent their young charges off, viewing such situations as divine opportunity. Children worked long hours at the lowest rates. Ruling classes saw this as a positive circumstance, because such children didn't depend on parish relief.

Child labor was so common in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that in 1802 Parliament passed the British Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, the first law regulating child labor. It stated that pauper children (those receiving charity) under the age of 9 could not work in cotton mills, and those under 14 could not work at night. The workday was 12 hours long. In 1819, the law was extended to include all children. These laws weren't paid much heed until 1833, when the Factory Act provided for inspections.

Some children helped their parents pay off debts, as did the youthful Dickens. Debt was a crime in Victorian England, and debtors were sent to prison until they could pay off their creditors. Such prisons were filthy, rat-infested places where inmates usually lived with their entire families during the period of incarceration. Family members were free to come and go as they pleased. The 12-year-old Dickens ate with his family at Marshalsea Debtor's Prison and slept in a squalid rooming house near the Warren Blacking Polish factory.



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CC

Special thanks to Emily Lovering.

Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Mann, top.

Fagin, bottom.

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Fall 2000 Program Listings

Oliver Twist

October 8 through October 22

A young orphan escapes from the workhouse and falls in with a gang of thieves. Charles Dickens's classic tale features a secret will, a villainous half brother, and a prostitute with a heart of gold. The three-part adaptation opens with a prequel dramatizing the background to the elaborate plot.

Cora Unashamed

Wednesday, October 25, repeating Sunday, October 29

ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre's American Collection premieres with Langston Hughes's haunting story of an African American woman's confrontation with death, abortion, and loneliness in rural Iowa in the early 1900s. Working as a domestic, she lives only for her daughter and the neglected child of her employers. Regina Taylor and Cherry Jones star.

ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre

Mrs. Brown

November 5

Queen Victoria and her Highland servant make quite a couple in this acclaimed 1997 feature film, co-produced by ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre and starring Judi Dench as Her Majesty and Billy Connolly as her plain spoken Scotsman John Brown. Dench's performance won an Oscar nomination.

The Railway Children

November 12

Three resourceful children save the day when their family is thrown into distress by the mysterious disappearance of their father. Based on E. Nesbit's beloved novel, first published in 1906, and starring Jenny Agutter, Michael Kitchen, and Richard Attenborough.

Check out our Web site www.pbs.org/masterpiece for updated program listings and schedules, as well as teachers' guides, essays and interviews, special features, and information about the last 30 years of ExxonMobil Masterpiece Theatre.

And coming this winter/spring...

Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*
Henry James's *The American*
Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*
And more!

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